

VZCZCXRO4564
PP RUEHDBU
DE RUEHNT #0877/01 1231239
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 031239Z MAY 07
FM AMEMBASSY TASHKENT
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7787
INFO RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE
RUEHC/DEPT OF LABOR WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TASHKENT 000877

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR SCA/CEN, DRL, G/TIP
LABOR FOR I/LAB

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/03/2017
TAGS: [ELAB](#) [SMIG](#) [ECON](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PBTS](#) [SOCI](#) [KZ](#) [UZ](#)
SUBJECT: HOW MANY UZBEKS DO YOU HAVE? MIGRANT LABORERS IN
SOUTHERN KAZAKHSTAN

REF: 06 ALMATY 2822

Classified By: Charge Brad Hanson, for reasons 1.4 (b, d).

11. (C) Summary: In coordination with Embassy Astana, Poloff conducted a one-day visit to Shymkent, Kazakhstan, to monitor the condition of Uzbek workers. Surprisingly, the vast majority of Uzbek workers claimed to be legally registered. Most of those interviewed were seasonal construction laborers who found their jobs through manual labor brokers. Uzbek workers commented that working conditions were far better in southern Kazakhstan than in Astana or Almaty. Members of the Uzbek diaspora holding Kazakhstani citizenship emphasized that they enjoyed far better living standards and pensions than their brethren in Uzbekistan, and were full of praise for President Nazarbayev. End summary.

12. (C) In coordination with Embassy Astana, Poloff conducted a one-day labor monitoring of Uzbek workers in Shymkent, Kazakhstan, and neighboring villages. Shymkent, a city of over half a million people, is 100 kilometers (62 miles) from the Uzbekistan-Kazakhstan border crossing at Chernyaevka/Ghisht Kuprik, and a 1.5 hour drive from Tashkent. (Note: The border crossing itself is less than fifteen minutes' drive from the Embassy. End note.) On April 19, a weekday, the Chernyaevka crossing was packed with Uzbek migrant workers headed to Kazakhstan. Most were traveling on buses and had to disembark for immigration checks. The Kazakhstan side of the border crossing was far more professional than the Uzbekistan side. In stark contrast to the Uzbekistan side, immigration and border guard booths displayed the names of the officers on duty; International Organization for Migration (IOM) posters informed travelers and workers of their rights; a poster highlighted a telephone hotline for reporting illegal or corrupt practices; and a box was labeled "suggestions, comments, and complaints."

13. (C) We interviewed dozens of Uzbek construction workers in and around Shymkent. Workers hailed from all over Uzbekistan including the Ferghana Valley, Samarkand, Bukhara, Khorezm and Surkhondarya. Nearly all workers interviewed claimed to be officially registered. Workers said that Migration Service police regularly visit construction sites to check documents. Legalized workers receive special migrant cards allowing them to work for three years. According to workers, police have detained employers who were using illegal workers until the employers agreed to pay the requisite sum to register them. (Note: A Kazakhstani law approved last year offered amnesty to workers from the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) who had entered the country before May 31, 2006, and had then registered between August 1-December 31, 2006. According to the Kazakh Ministry of Internal Affairs, 164,586 CIS citizens were legalized through

last year, s amnesty, of whom 117,133 (more than 71 percent) were from Uzbekistan. The remainder were from Kyrgyzstan, Russia and Tajikistan - reftel. End note.)

14. (C) Construction workers are grouped into teams with others from the same region. Most workers we spoke with had found their jobs through Uzbek manual labor ("mardikor") brokers "selling" their services to Kazakhstani brokers. Many workers, for example, were "sold" in the Kazakhstan border town of Zhetisay. None of the workers interviewed had heard of Uzbeks being held as slave workers in the Shymkent area. All agreed that Uzbeks in southern Kazakhstan were far better treated than in Astana or Almaty. (Note: Uzbeks who had worked as construction workers in Astana said the conditions were appalling, with tough hours and awful bosses. End note.) Some members of the local Uzbek diaspora who hold Kazakhstani citizenship stated that many Uzbek girls had come from across the border to work in southern Kazakhstan as domestic helpers--mainly cleaning ladies and maids--and as commercial sex workers. According to the sources, Uzbek girls are well represented in Shymkent's "sauna" and "massage" salons.

15. (C) Employers generally provide migrant workers with basic food and lodging. An eleven-man group of Samarkand workers building a house under the supervision of a Kazakhstani landlord's fifteen-year-old son said that they collectively earn \$8,000 for a four-month job lasting from April to July, or about \$725 per person. (Note: This is approximately \$180 per person per month -- or almost triple the average monthly salary in Uzbekistan. End note.) A five-person team from Kashkadarya said that they were awarded a \$5,000 contract to build a house, which came to \$300 per month for each worker. They added that they return home about every two months to

TASHKENT 00000877 002 OF 002

visit their families. A four-man team from Khorezm said that they each earn \$400 per month. In order to return home safely, workers often pay as much as 3,000 tenge (approximately USD 25), for a shared car to Tashkent's central bus station, where they catch onward transportation to their final destinations. Uzbeks seemed able to easily identify fellow countrymen in nearby houses saying, for example, "those over there are from Khorezm, and in that house are from Andijon."

16. (C) Workers typically send remittances home through friends returning to their city or region. Due to the longer distance, workers from Khorezm Province prefer to send money home via electronic fund transfer services such as Western Union or Contact. Most workers told us that they were obliged to work abroad in order to feed their families, commenting that although some jobs were available back home, the salaries were insufficient to sustain their wives, children, and parents.

17. (C) Shymkent's markets and bazaars are full of Uzbeks selling fruit and vegetables, much of which is imported from Uzbekistan. Although some of the traders hail from the Fergana Valley and other Uzbek provinces, most are ethnic Uzbeks who grew up in Kazakhstan. Agricultural workers raising onions in a neighboring village told Poloff they were all ethnic Uzbeks from Kazakhstan. Salesmen at Shymkent's main car market told us that Uzbeks were among their best customers, particularly on weekends. Shymkent's car market, with its wide array of brands and models, including pre-owned luxury cars, is a popular destination for Uzbek car brokers and middlemen. (Note: Uzbekistan's car market is comprised almost entirely of Korean and Russian vehicles. End note.) Only well-connected or wealthy Uzbeks can generally afford to purchase cars from Shymkent, however, since Uzbek law requires that imported vehicles be assessed import duties and other taxes totaling 100 percent of the value of the vehicle.

18. (C) Members of the Uzbek diaspora, ethnic Uzbeks who hold

Kazakhstani citizenship, invited us into their homes and emphasized how pleased they were with life in Kazakhstan. (Note: Many neighboring villages near Shymkent, such as Sayram, are predominantly ethnic Uzbek. End note.) The Uzbeks said that they maintain close ties with their brethren across the border. They stated that Uzbeks were very well treated, and proudly displayed local Uzbek-language newspapers. They noted that they enjoyed a much higher standard of living than their cross-border kin, adding that Kazakhstani pensions far exceed those in Uzbekistan. They also noted that it is much easier to get a bank loan or line of credit in Kazakhstan. They commented that the vast majority of local Uzbeks enthusiastically support President Nazarbayev and voted for him in the presidential elections. They also claimed that in recognition of their strong support, President Nazarbayev regularly meets with them during his trips to southern Kazakhstan. (Note: The head of the Southern Kazakhstan District Tax Committee, who often visits Tashkent to play golf, has told Poloff that Nazarbayev maintains a palace in Sarygach, a small Kazakhstani town just across the border from Tashkent, where a golf course is being built. End note.)

¶9. (C) Comment: Other than our surprise at how many Uzbeks appeared to be officially registered, our research in Shymkent fits with what we expected. Kazakhstan is a popular labor destination for Uzbeks, and is closer geographically and culturally than Russia.

¶10. (U) This cable has been cleared by Embassy Astana.

HANSON